



ANNIE BESANT

MAN'S LIFE IN
THIS AND OTHER
W O R L D S

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I. IN THE PHYSICAL WORLD : THE MEANING OF DEATH

THERE are many people who cannot pass through life happily and contentedly unless they possess some definite knowledge, knowledge which is precise, knowledge which enables them to understand themselves as well as the world around them. They cannot remain satisfied to be living in an unintelligible world, to be constantly seeing the passage of events which appear to them to be without reason, without explanation. They cannot be content to see the great differences of happiness between human beings without asking: "Why are some men born to such misery? why are others born to happy and prosperous lives?" Constantly these questions arise; they torment the minds and the hearts of the thoughtful; and I want, if I can, to-day and on the two succeeding Sundays, to put before you a theory of life, a theory of man, which perhaps may make your own nature and the world

which surrounds you more intelligible, thereby making yourself more useful. That is the aim of three lectures on a big subject. I do not want to convince you that I am right in what I put to you ; all that I want to do is to stimulate *you* to think : not to ask you to accept a theory ready-made which I put before you, but only to ask you to consider the data that I submit ; thus to form your own judgment, thus to use your own intelligence, and thus to come to a *conclusion* which shall satisfy you because *you* have made it, which shall prove to you a guide in life because *you* have come to the conclusion by your own thought.

Now, first, as regards the value of definite knowledge. To use this knowledge is to be able to steer the ship of your life, instead of drifting—as so many of us do. It is to be able to see your goal, to choose your path. It is gradually to acquire such a mastery alike over body and over mind that you will be a self-conscious being not only in the physical world, but also in the worlds connected with it, those into which you will pass when death strikes away the body. In three worlds you all are living. In one consciously, in the other two, as modern psychology would say, subconsciously. One you know—the physical world around you ; in that you act, in that your emotions play, in that your thoughts are ever busy. I shall want to show you that there is a sphere, or world, corresponding to your emotions, from which those emotions assert

themselves in your physical life; that there is a world, a sphere, of thought, from which come impulses which show themselves in the physical brain. Subconsciously to-day you live in the world of the emotions, in the world of the intellect. As you develop by ordinary evolution, the subconscious will become conscious; that which now you dimly sense will become clear, definite, precise. That is not a mere theory; for there are some amongst us who have deliberately quickened their evolution and have turned their subconscious into conscious knowledge.

It is along those lines that I want to lead you: dealing, to-day, with the physical world most familiar to you, showing you how the worlds of emotion and of thought manifest themselves through the physical body in the physical world; showing you next Sunday, how, in sleep, putting aside the physical body, you live consciously in the world of the emotions, the first world into which you pass on the other side of death. And then on the third Sunday, showing you how the thought world is really the heavenly world into which later you pass after death, when the intermediate world lies behind you. That is the rough sketch of the path along which I hope to lead you; laying the facts before you and, as I said, leaving you to judge their value. As that is done, I shall hope to show you that modern Science, modern psychology, is beginning to recognise the irruption of these other

two worlds into the physical, is beginning to try to understand this surging up from the realm it calls the subconscious. It realises the force, it recognises the enormous power, with which from time to time these waves sweep away everything that we know as reason, as ordinary emotion. If you will study modern psychology you will realise how much evidence there is for some of the more obscure facts that I shall need to put before you on the succeeding Sundays, and then I think I shall persuade you to study the subject, one of the most entrancing to which the human intelligence can address itself and in that way to gain a strength, a power, an endurance, a force, which nothing else can give. For the man who has learned to live in the three worlds consciously and fully, who can judge the relative proportions of the seen and the unseen, who can weigh in the balance of his knowledge the things that are weighty and the things that are indifferent because light and valueless—he can discriminate between the real and the unreal. And he can, when the portal of death opens before him—that portal which, to most of us, I fear, opens on the unknown and therefore the dreaded—he can walk straight through the portal with head erect; with fearless heart, with unflinching courage, for he is leaving behind him only the grossest part of him, the physical body, and he goes on with his emotions as they were, his thoughts as they were—the man as he knows

himself—into those regions that to him are not unknown but familiar, are not a dreaded but a hoped-for land.

That is the rough outline that I am going to try to fill up. And now at the beginning I must put one thing to you that may seem to you for a moment more difficult to grasp than all the rest that I shall have to say. Think for a moment—whether you be a Christian or a Hindū in faith it matters not—think for a moment of all that your religion has taught you of the nature of God. I ask you to recall it, because man is made in the image of the Divine, as said in a splendid verse in the Apocryphal Scriptures of the Hebrews: “God made man to be the image of His own Eternity.” Man in his consciousness reflects God Himself, and because you have been taught some amount of theology, it may for a moment make it easier for you to follow what I want to put to you, if you think of what your religion has taught you of the triple nature of the Divine Being, and realise what that means when reflected in man as Spirit. Those who are philosophic in their thinking will think of god as triple in His consciousness. My Hindū brethren will be very familiar with term Sathchidānanda, describing the triple aspect of the one supreme God—existence, knowledge, bliss; that is familiar. Some of those who come from western lands will remember the splendid passage in Dante, where he speaks of One in whom power and act

are one. More simple perhaps, because more popular, will it be to recall to your mind what is called the doctrine of the Trinity in Christianity, the Trimūrti—the Three-formed—in Hinduism. You will at once realise, in looking at it, that you have the three aspects anthropomorphised—put into the form of man.

You have the great aspect of Being, that shows itself as Creative Activity, that gives life to all other beings, the one source of life, of existence, He who among the Hindūs is known as the Third Person in their Trinity, Brahmā, floating on the waters of matter; among the Christians, the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of God, who is said to “move on the face of the waters,” under whose brooding Being the whole universe comes into existence.

Then think again of the Second Person in both, —to the Hindū Viṣṇu, the source of all Wisdom and of the sustaining power of Love by which the universe is maintained; to the Christian, that mighty Second Person who is the Son of the eternal Father, to whom they give the name of the Christ in whom they believe.

Then the Supreme, the Father of the Christians, the one who represents Ānanda, Mahādeva, whose attribute is Power; for only where power is perfect may blissful peace be secured. Peace is ruffled when we fear; but to the Omnipotent no fear is possible, and therefore that eternal peace may

never be ruffled by aught that is outside; for naught exists that is not within Himself.

So have we been taught as regards so much of the nature of God as our poor minds can grasp; a three-faced Unit; mighty Power, and Wisdom-Love, and Creative Activity.

It is in that image and in that likeness that your human Spirit is shaped. The Power of the Supreme in you becomes will; the Wisdom-Love of the Supreme in you becomes wisdom and compassion; the Creative Activity of the Supreme becomes in you the intellect by which you give form to matter—the intellect which, when it appears in the supreme form of Genius, enables the painter, out of canvas and paint, to make the splendid picture that lives through the centuries; which enables the musician to gather together the scattered notes and to weave the perfect harmony that lives as long as man shall love great music; which enables the sculptor to take chisel and mallet in hand and hew out of the block of marble the beauteous image which his thought has hidden within it, and which all men can see when the superincumbent marble is cut away, and the idea of the genius has manifested itself as form. So great is man, so mighty are his possibilities; for man's Spirit is a fragment of the Divine. Need I remind the Hindū how he is taught to say: "Thou art Brahman," and the Christian: "Know ye not that your body is the temple of God, and the Spirit

of God dwelleth in you?" So mighty is the possibility of the seed of the Divine growing into gradual perfection, until at last all men shall be perfect, "even as your Father in heaven is perfect". Such then is the Spirit with three aspects: Will, Wisdom, Intellect. That is one of the points I will ask you to bear in mind throughout; for I shall not be able to come back and repeat—the work is too large.

Many of you will be familiar with the triple division of man into body, soul and Spirit. This is very convenient, for the reason that the divine Spirit broods over man, and that part of his consciousness which is embodied is sometimes spoken of as soul—a convenient phrase when understood; that triple division made by S. Paul is one that you may well bear in mind throughout. The Spirit is "unborn, undying, perpetual, ancient and eternal". He rather broods over the body than actually dwells within it, and that portion of him that is consciousness and life in the body is conveniently denominated soul; hence I shall use that word. So that we have the Spirit, the Divine in man, overshadowing him, as it were, and ever striving to draw the lower upwards; the Soul, which is the Spirit embodied, and because embodied often blinded, foolish, helpless; and the Body, the material covering (no matter what the kind may be), matter which the soul puts on as a garment in order to come into touch with the world in which

he is to evolve; for, as a seed is sown in the soil, and without the soil may not grow, so the divine seed is sown in the soil of human experience in order that it may unfold its hidden powers.

Now, this triple Spirit, acting as soul in the body, works along three lines. It works as mind. You are familiar with the power of thought which makes you man, and it uses what you may call, as Professor Clifford calls it, 'mind-stuff'—a convenient phrase. Mind is the power of the Spirit working in mind-stuff. We generally call it 'mental matter,' and I use the rather ugly German word because it was used by so great a scientist as William Kingdon Clifford. Next it works in emotional matter, and thirdly in physical. Emotional matter is that which your emotions set vibrating. Nothing, no force, can work without a medium in which to work. All science tells you that. No force without matter, no matter without force, to use a well recognised maxim. Hence these three powers of man need a material medium in which to work. For intellect, Soul demands a form of matter which we call mental; for the expression of feeling, for pleasure and for pain, he demands another type of matter, the emotional. We call it emotional—sometimes astral—because the emotions use it as their means of expression. Lastly, he needs also physical matter, whereby to act in the physical world in which he is living; for you cannot by thought normally cause action,

movement of matter in the physical world. I do not say it is impossible, but I say that the ordinary man cannot do it. In order to move ordinary matter by his will, he needs a physical body; so the physical body becomes the instrument of the will to bring about action, as in emotional matter the emotions work, and in mental matter, the mind. Now, the whole of this body of yours—made of mental matter, emotional matter and physical matter—is only an instrument, a piece of apparatus, if you like to call it so. It is not the man himself, who is the triple Spirit, the image of the Divine of which I have spoken.

When you come to deal with your physical body, think of it, if you will for a moment, as consisting of two parts, like those which you may see if you go, say, into a printing-press any day. You will find a printing-press there, but of itself it is motionless. "How is it set to work?" you ask. "Oh, I have a motor, I have a dynamo, I apply power to the machine, and then the machine works." Now your physical body has those two things in it—that which is like the motor, Vitality, working in ether, and the mere machine, which is the apparatus, the dense body, that you can see, that you can touch, that by the senses you can cognise. If you think of the division in that mechanical way, I think it will remain clear to you. You practically consist down here of an apparatus or machine, very beautifully made,

exquisite in its adaptations, and of the motor that drives it. Vitality is the motor; the whole dense body is the machine.

Now that machine answers to the triple soul of man in different parts that are familiar to all of you. You have a brain and a nervous system—that is the part of the instrument that belongs to thought—and your thought works on that brain and nervous system—the cerebro-spinal system; that is your instrument for thinking. Then there is another part, which is called the ganglionic, connected with another nervous system, the sympathetic; that is your instrument for the emotions. Then the muscles. The muscles are the instruments for action, moved by the will through the nerves. That is all you really want to know about your physical body, for the full understanding of what I am putting to you. Your brain and spinal nerves, as the instrument of the mind; the ganglia and the sympathetic nervous system, as the instrument of the emotions; the muscles, as the instruments of the will. And the fundamental difference of what we call sex turns on the predominance of one or the other of the two first. In the average normal man the brain and the spinal nerves dominate the whole. Those are the strongest things in him. That is his characteristic as man. In woman the ganglia and the sympathetic nervous system dominate the whole. There is the fundamental difference that no laws can possibly affect or change,

and the work of the sexes in the body politic must ever rest on this great natural and ineradicable difference between the two—the difference between the functions of the father and the mother, to suit which the bodies are built. In the one the dominance of the brain; in the other of the emotions and of all that nourishes. And it is well to realise that; it is often a great help in judging many of the current questions, so that you may utilise both sexes to the full, and the country may not be deprived of the services of either, working along the channel in which service may best be rendered.

And so in looking thus at the human being we find these three things marked. I used the word 'subconscious'. You are conscious of the working of the mind and the nervous system; that is part of your waking intelligence. You are not conscious, except in the sense of subconsciousness, of the working of the mind in mental matter, in which it is at work all the time, and only now and then you become conscious of it as genius, to which I will allude in a moment. So also of the emotions. You know that your emotions affect your bodies, sometimes in a very startling way. You have a great shock of grief—the heart stops. The heart is a muscle, not a gland, but it stops because of a nerve of the sympathetic system connected with it, which goes to the heart and stimulates or retards its action; there are two nerves, one which makes it move, the other which regulates its activity.

Suppose it stops—what happens? One of these nerves has been stimulated by the emotion of grief, so stimulated that it grips the muscle of the heart, and the heart cannot for a moment move.

Fear sometimes stops the heart, sometimes causes palpitation of the heart. That depends entirely upon which of the sympathetic nerves is affected. If it be the one which regulates the heart's beating, then the sudden inrush may make the heart tumultuous and the other nerve is inhibited, checked, in its action. But always the emotions work through the sympathetic system either on the heart or on the whole digestive system, always by the sympathetic nerves on the ganglia or muscles of the body. Tears, what are they but the simple action of a gland in the eye stimulated to over-activity by a nerve affected by an emotion? And I only ask you to note these points in order that you may realise that the mind is working on the body in a definite way all the time; that the emotions are working on the body in a definite way all time; and that the muscles, directed by the will, are the parts of the body which you call upon when you want to move a piece of matter from one place to another. The will must call on the muscle; then action takes place.

Now that subconscious action I spoke of, mental and emotional, may be brought within the conscious life; that is the point that I shall want to deal with when I come to speak to you of man's

life in the second world, the astral, not the physical. For the moment let us be satisfied to leave it that we have here an instrument played upon by the will, by the intelligence and by the emotions, and that we are familiar with the parts of the body which answer to each of these impacts.

Now for a moment take Genius. Genius is the normal working of the mind in its own world, suddenly acting on the brain which is in a state called 'unstable equilibrium'. You know exactly what that means. You may have a body so fixed that, though you push it, it does not move; even if it goes a little to one side, it recovers at once. Or you may have a body which when you push it begins to swing, moves over and over again, may be entirely upset, or only gradually perhaps comes to rest.

Now it is that condition of the brain, in unstable equilibrium, which gives the opportunity for the manifestation of the mind that we know as Genius. That is why Shakespeare said: "Great wits to madness near allied." That is why Lombroso, the great Italian scientist, said that all geniuses, whether literary or artistic or religious, were really mad. There is a truth underlying it—a half-truth rather than a whole. The half-truth is that the brain of the genius is always unstable, because it is on the road to the highest evolution. It is the high-water mark of human progress which is reached by the man whom we call a genius. His

brain is growing, his brain is rapidly evolving more and more. The cells in it are sending out in every direction new roots, new protrusions. Where there is life and activity there is always instability. You can respond to every-day thoughts with brains that are very little unstable. The commonplace, of life do not demand any high mental ability; but when you begin to think on a subject difficult and obscure, when you begin to strain your brain to grasp something beyond your ordinary mental power, then there comes a strain which shows that you are putting upon that brain an unaccustomed force, and then care is needed lest by pushing too rapidly onwards you should break down the equilibrium, so that it cannot be restored. And here is the fact which shows the half-truth of Lombroso. There are two kinds of instability: there is the instability of growth; there is the instability of disease, of degeneration: the one is genius, the other madness. One has in it the promise of the future; the other is breaking down and going back into inorganic matter. The madman's brain is unstable, it is true; but it is unstable by lesion, by injury, by decay. The brain of the genius is unstable, because it is evolving so rapidly that every day some new power is being added to the brain, some new force is being sent down by the soul. And so with great religious teachers—men of religious genius. They also have these brains, delicate, fragile, unstable in the sense

of progress and not of disease. On them beat waves from higher worlds ; on them pours down the stream of superphysical knowledge ; inspiration grips them, and they do in inspiration what in their normal state they cannot do. Words pour through them that they could not normally speak ; thoughts flood them that otherwise they could not reach. Every religion admits the existence of such men. They are the revealers of the unseen. They are the inspired men of every faith. Lombroso said that those men, too, are mad. Oh ! if genius and if religious inspiration be madness, then may God give us more madmen in our humanity ! We would give a million ordinary brains for one brain through which the higher can come down and reveal itself to us who are blind.

How is it possible to avoid that difficulty on which the finger of the keen scientist was laid ? India has given us a method which enables man to reach sensitiveness and receptivity of brain, without running the danger of hysteria, which is the first sign of mental disease. It is what is known as YOGA. With its mental aspect for the moment I hardly need to deal ; I am thinking more of its physical training. The theory of yoga is that man is a Spirit in a body. Normally that Spirit does not much affect the body ; but if you will make your body receptive, then the Spirit will be able to use it as an instrument of music, and play upon it the perfect melodies which belong to heaven rather

than to earth. So wise men devised the system which they called yoga—union, union with the Divine. “You must train your body,” they said. The normal human body is not ready to receive the waves and billows of the higher life, which would shiver it to pieces. Before you challenge that great inflow, prepare your body to receive it. So a system is laid down, of food, of sleep, of physical purification, which, without sacrificing health, makes the body far more sensitive, far more receptive, than that of the ordinary man. Then meditation is prescribed, which means the concentration of thought, the fixing it on a single object of thought, and the brain is taught to submit itself to this discipline. You find the same thing among the Roman Catholics, more largely among those who have retired from the world, though to some degree also among the laity, in which people are taught to train their minds to obedience and their brains to receptivity. The rules are hard, and that is why many do not care to take it up. You must not eat meat, which coarsens the body; you want to be fine, delicate, and responsive. You must not touch alcohol—any form of alcohol—because it poisons parts of the brain. Some parts of the brain are poisoned by the fumes of the alcohol—parts which you use in meditation. That is absolutely forbidden. So all the life is regulated. Sleep is regulated, neither too much nor too little. Too much will make the body sluggish; too little leads

to nervous overstrain. Yoga is a system of exquisite balance, neither too much nor too little of anything. It is absolutely scientific, and bound to succeed because it is built on the laws of nature. But it needs years of strenuous application before the work is done. Then, when that work is over, when the brain has become sensitive and the body purified, you may safely throw open the doors to the Spirit, and welcome him to the temple that you have purified for his service. Then comes the conscious life in all the worlds, then the higher senses, that may be opened as readily as the senses of the body. The physical body is our most perfect instrument now, because the first and the most evolved. The others are in the course of evolution, and their evolution is quickened by yoga.

In this physical body of ours we have an instrument which may be developed to the highest needs. Only the conditions are rigid, and, like all other laws of nature, are inviolable. If you make the conditions, nature gives you what her laws bring. If you do not, never will those forces come to you, for law is changeless; it is the expression of the divine nature. For a moment pause on that.

What is death? If I may go back to the simile I used in the beginning, it is the breaking away of the motor from the machine, nothing more; the motor—the finer parts of your body, formed of the physical ethers in which all the forces of vitality play, by which the dense part moves, feels, thinks,

lives—leaves behind the dense body, the corpse as we call it; death is nothing more than that. It does not touch you, in your really human nature; and it only takes away from you the physical body in which you have been living, and which you have left every night in sleep, so that the leaving is no new and strange thing. It is a coat that you use, and death is nothing more than putting off your overcoat, in which you wandered through the street, when you come inside your house and no longer need its protection. It is nothing more than that; and yet you fear death! The putting off of a garment because it is no longer wanted, because it is no longer useful for the high purposes of the Spirit, who is man.

But that outer garment of yours, that body, has one great advantage if you will only learn to use it. It is automatic—you know the word, that which acts of itself—and you can make your body do exactly what you will; by a little practice you utilise the automatism of the body to gain the ends that you desire. You find your body resists doing something physical you want to do. You practise that act. Practice makes a habit, and when the habit is perfect the body performs the action automatically. Those of you who play on the piano or on the *viṇā*, know that when you were learning you had to think of every motion, you had to watch what you were doing; thought had to make the fingers perform the motion necessary for

the violin string, the vīṇā string, the note on the piano. But if you have learned, you do not need your fingers to be consciously under the control of the mind; they go "by themselves". You never think of the fingers at all, they are your trained servants to act as you have thought them; and the automatism of the body enables you to leave them to do the work that you have taught them to do.

There is not one bad habit that you cannot change by a continued exercise of will. Do you find an evil thought comes into the brain, and you do not want it there? Then turn it out at once and replace it by a good one, and presently the automatism of the brain will help you and will act for you. You have a habit of irritability, you speak hastily, your tongue runs away from you? Impose silence on the tongue. Never speak until after you have thought. It will be wearisome for a few weeks, and then it will become automatic, and the habit of thought will control the tongue and never allow a word to be spoken which the mind does not demand. Oh! it is so easy if you only knew. The first step is difficult, as all first steps are, but nature has so built your bodies that they become obedient to your will if only you impose a habit upon them which makes them obedient.

And on that point for to-day I must stop. I spoke of Spirit, soul and body. Let me, if I can, show you a picture of yourself; the Spirit above you, the soul, the waking consciousness, in the

middle, as it were, and the body below. The soul in the centre may aspire upward to the Spirit, or it may be dragged downward to the body. It is in the soul that the battle of man lies—ever seeking to rise upward to the Spirit whose child he is, ever dragged down by the cravings and appetites of the body which he came into the world to master. Upward he aspires, downward he is dragged—and *there* is the struggle which every human being knows. Everything depends for you upon following the aspiration, resisting the appetite, rising upward to the God within yourself, conquering the body, which is your servant really, though you allow it to be your master. Oh! if you had a splendid horse which would not at first obey the rein, high-spirited, strong-willed, you would not ill-use it, you would not break its spirit, but you would gently, carefully, train it, curb it, teach it, until it carried you wherever you would go. Such an animal is your body. Do not ill-use it; do not treat it brutally; train it, curb it, restrain it, make it obedient to your own command, obedient to the will of the Spirit; and then as you live and grow older, the Spirit shall become the ruler of the body, the body shall be redeemed by spiritual power, and rendered a noble instrument of the Spirit who is its lord.

And so when struggle comes to you, when the higher appeals to you, when the lower allures you, remember that on your choice your future depends.

Every time that you yield to the lower allurements it becomes stronger; in the years to come every yielding is an added chain, an added weight, hindering your ascent. Listen to the voice of the Spirit who calls to you: "You are mine, and not the body's; I sent you to redeem, not to be enslaved." If so you choose, life shall grow easier, gladder, stronger, with every month that passes, every year that lies behind. You are Divine. You are Gods in the making, not devils who have to be overcome. And if you will yield to the higher, the Divine will more and more declare itself as manifest, and you will know the peace, the joy, which belong to the man who has realised himself, and has made his body his servant and his instrument.

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